ELL Reader

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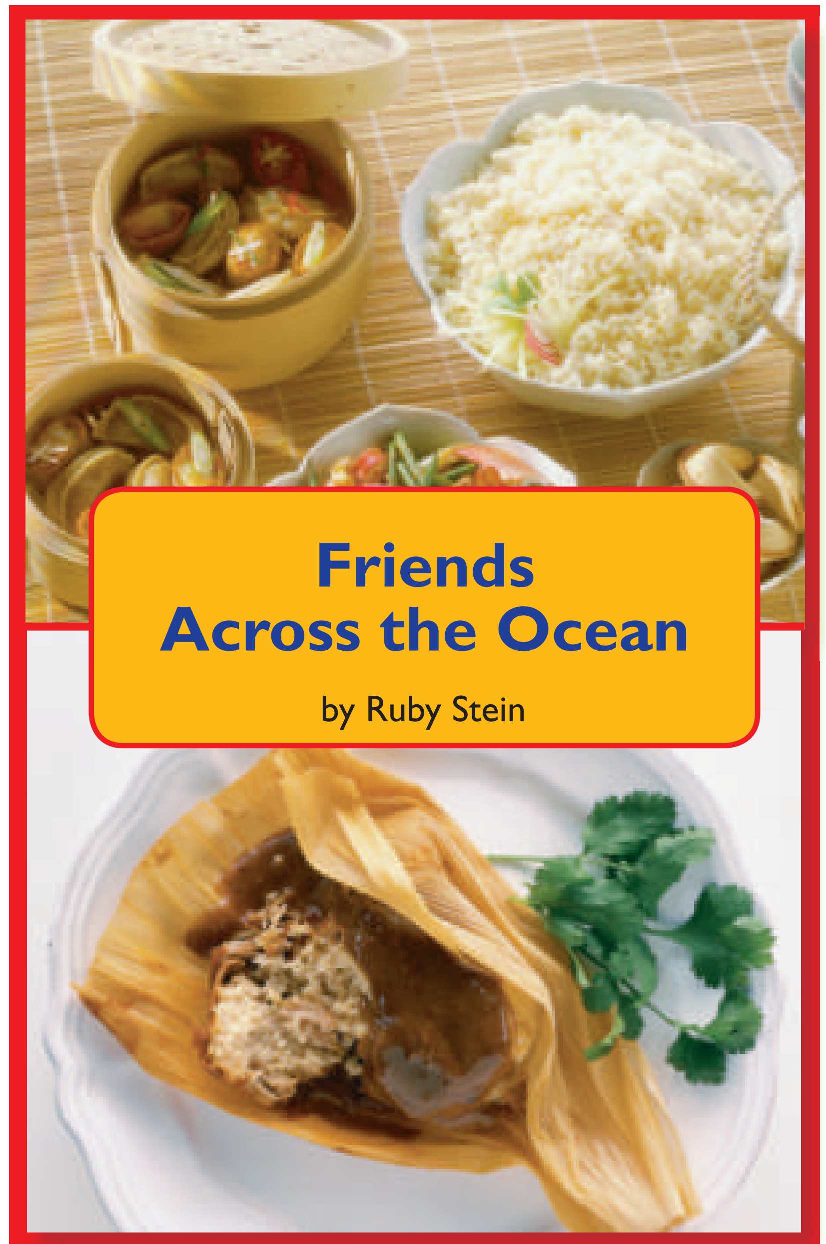


Friends Across the Ocean

by Ruby Stein









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Marisa and Luk Sun are e-pen pals. Marisa lives in Guatemala, and Luk Sun lives in China. Both are 11 years old. Each of them has learned many interesting things about the other's country. Here are some of their messages.

China

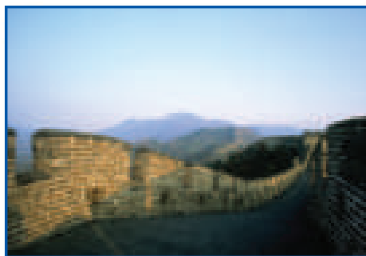
Guatemala

Subject: Ancient Civilizations

Dear Marisa,

There is so much to say about China because it has a very long history. To help us learn about our past, we divide our history into different time periods. Each time period has its own name. During the Qin dynasty or period, the first emperor of China began to build the Great Wall of China. This wall was built to protect China from invaders. The wall was built in sections over several time periods. The Great Wall is 30 feet high and 25 feet wide in some places. It is over 4,000 miles long and winds through China like a dragon! I took a trip with my family to see a section of the Great Wall near Beijing.

Your new e-pen pal,
Luk Sun Chin



The Great Wall in China took hundreds of years to build.

dynasty: a period of time named after rulers from a certain family

Send Mail: Message Composition

Send Reply Attach Spelling

Subject: Re: Ancient Civilizations

Dear Luk Sun,

Learning about China is fun! Guatemala had an ancient civilization, too. The Maya Indians were among the first people to live in Guatemala. They built many cities in north Guatemala, where there are jungles. The Maya are known for building incredible pyramids. Some of the pyramids were considered sacred. Only priests could enter. Some pyramids were very tall and had unique carvings on them.

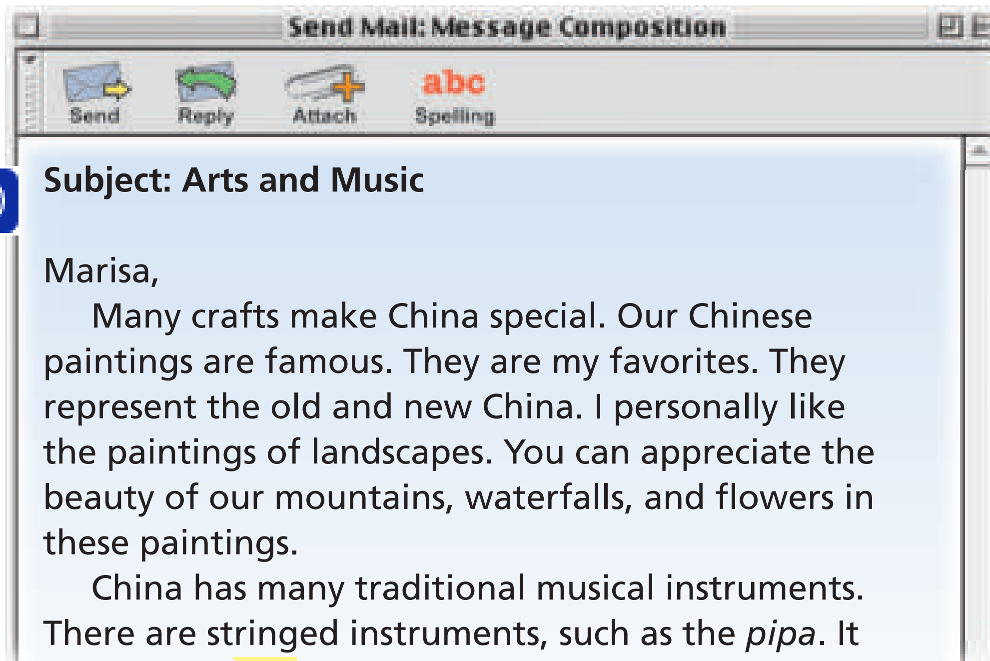
One of these ancient cities, Tikal, is a national park now. When my family went to visit this ancient city, we climbed a large pyramid called the Temple of the Grand Jaguar.

Please tell me about the arts and music of China.

Yours truly,
Marisa Ortiz



The largest pyramid in Guatemala is called the Temple of the Grand Jaguar.



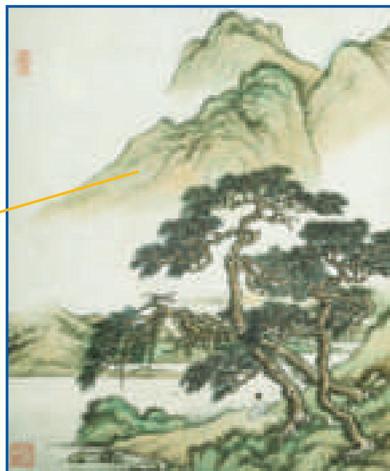
Subject: Arts and Music

Marisa,

Many crafts make China special. Our Chinese paintings are famous. They are my favorites. They represent the old and new China. I personally like the paintings of landscapes. You can appreciate the beauty of our mountains, waterfalls, and flowers in these paintings.

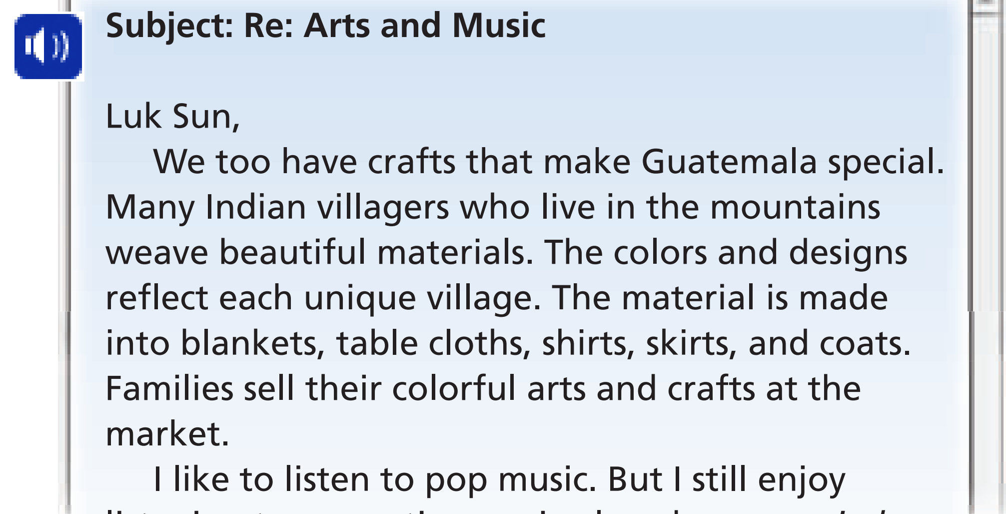
China has many traditional musical instruments. There are stringed instruments, such as the *pipa*. It looks like a lute. My favorite is the Chinese flute. The sound can be sweet like a bird or mysterious like the jungle.

Luk Sun



lute: a stringed instrument that looks like a guitar





Subject: Re: Arts and Music

Luk Sun,

We too have crafts that make Guatemala special. Many Indian villagers who live in the mountains weave beautiful materials. The colors and designs reflect each unique village. The material is made into blankets, table cloths, shirts, skirts, and coats. Families sell their colorful arts and crafts at the market.

I like to listen to pop music. But I still enjoy listening to our native music played on a *marimba*. The marimba looks like a large xylophone made out of wood. Players use mallets to strike the bars. It has a sweet sound that you would recognize anywhere. I think I would like to hear the flute and marimba played together!

What foods could I find in China?

Marisa


marimba

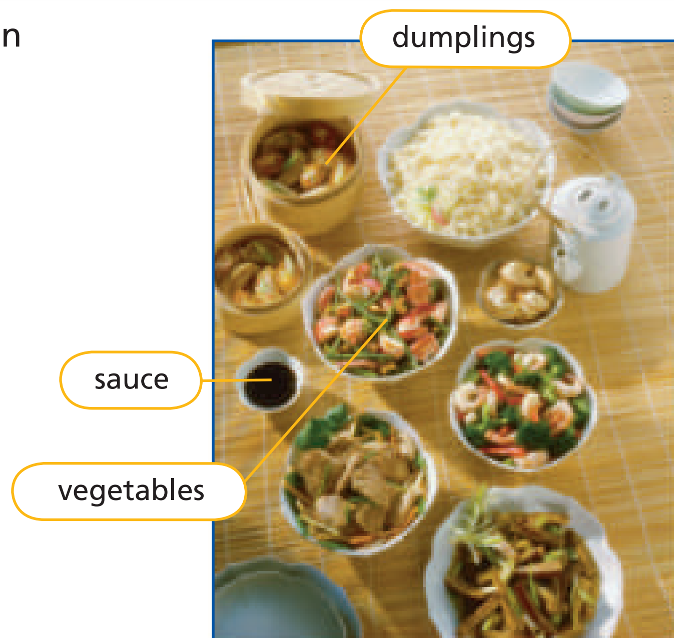


Subject: Food

Dear Marisa,

People in China eat many different foods. Some meals are served with rice, while others are served with noodles. We mix our meals with vegetables, chicken, or fish. Some of our food is very spicy! My favorite meal is dumplings with hot tea. Dumplings are made from dough and are filled with meats, vegetables, or sweets. Then we fry the dumplings and dip them in a sauce. I like to eat them anytime, but my family always serves them on the Chinese New Year. What is your favorite meal?

Luk Sun





Subject: Re: Food

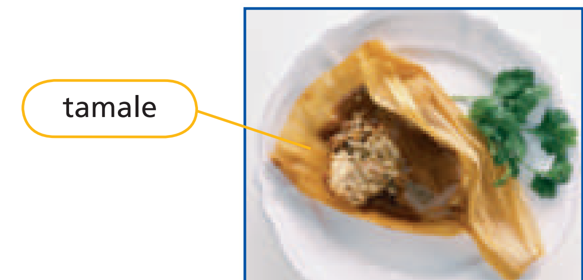
Dear Luk Sun,

We eat many different meals, but my favorite meal is my mother's tamales. They may be similar to your delicious dumplings! Tamales are made from cornmeal and filled with vegetables or meat. On special occasions, we also eat sweet tamales made with cinnamon and raisins. They are wrapped in banana leaves and steamed until they are done.

For a great snack after school, I eat mango and papaya. These tropical fruits are juicy and delicious. Although I'm not supposed to eat too many snacks, I also like potato chips!

What kind of celebrations do you have?

Marisa



Extend Language Borrowed Words

Many English words are borrowed from other languages.

Borrowed Word	Original Language
tamale	*Spanish*
marimba	*Spanish*
tea	*Chinese*



Subject: Festivals

Marisa,

I am glad you asked! Many of the Chinese celebrations and festivals have processions or parades and fireworks. My favorite celebration is the Chinese New Year. Our family gets together to remember our relatives and to show our gratitude. Then my family goes to see the dragons that dance in the streets. The dragon's head is made of paper, and the body is made of silk. People get under the dragon to make it weave through the streets. The dragon is a symbol of wisdom and good luck. Thank you for sharing so much about your country. I can't believe how similar our customs are!

Friends forever,
Luk Sun

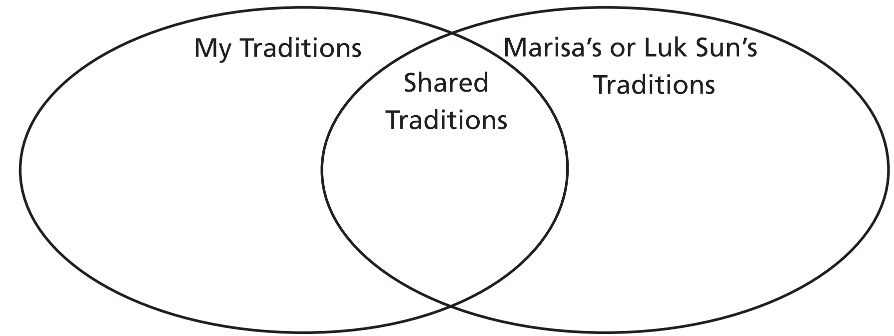


Talk About It

1. What two customs or traditions do Luk Sun and Marisa share?
2. What is one difference between China and Guatemala?

Write About It

3. Make a Venn diagram on another paper. List some of your family's cultural traditions. Then compare and contrast them to either Luk Sun's or Marisa's.



Extend Language

The word *tamale* came to the English language from Spanish, and the word *tea* came from Chinese. What other English words from other languages do you know?

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